

## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives

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### ABSTRACT

Hypnotism, the study of hypnosis has many facets which may not be known to the common man. This paper will make the readers aware of the origin of Hypnosis and will take them on a journey of the history of hypnosis, acquaint the readers to the stalwarts in the field and enlighten them on the evolution of this mysterious field. We shall explore the process in detail and shall learn how hypnosis is done, what effect does it leave on the subject being hypnotized, what changes happen in the body and the brain of the subject, how the subject responds to the suggestions of the hypnotizer, how the patients suffering from pain, addiction and psychiatric disorders respond positively and get treated by hypnotherapy. We shall also explore the dark side of hypnosis and shall see the similarity between hypnosis and parapsychological phenomena and how hypnosis can help in parapsychological research. We shall also examine whether the hypnosis phenomenon is scientific. On the whole, we shall be looking at many perspectives of hypnosis in the paper.

**Keywords:** *Hypnotism, Hypnosis, Hypnotherapy, Mesmerism, Is hypnosis scientific, Dangers of hypnosis, parapsychology and hypnotism*

As a child, I witnessed a staged hypnotic feat in which a friend of mine when put in a trance state by a hypnotist was describing the sweetness and juiciness of rasgulla (a variety in Indian sweets) while we were seeing him nibbling at a baby potato. He was genuinely feeling a ‘sweet’ taste under hypnotic suggestion from the hypnotizer. Our tiny minds could not understand how our friend got fooled!! In adulthood, I happened to witness hypnosis being performed by a psychiatrist while treating my relative suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and the importance of hypnotism dawned on me that it was much more than a trick. Later I came to know that hypnotism is being used frequently to treat patients having pain or people desirous of getting rid of bad habits of smoking/drug addiction. I also learned that hypnotism was being used to treat psychiatric patients suffering from behavioural disorders.

It is interesting to note that the fascinating features of hypnotism have attracted fictional writers and many crime stories have surfaced where the writers used hypnotism as the central idea behind the fictional crime stories which flooded the TV shows and even Cinema. Hypnotism is immensely popular and hardly there would be a person who has not heard about hypnotism.

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## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives

In fact, Hypnotism is the study of the process of hypnosis and in this paper, we shall try to understand what is Hypnosis, learn about its origin and history, assess whether it is a mere trickery or a scientific phenomenon, what goes on in the body, and brain of the subject undergoing hypnosis, how the world has accepted it to use it in clinical therapeutic use and whether there is a dark side of hypnosis that we do not know.

The term hypnotism will not feature now on in the paper because hypnotism means the study of hypnosis and the hypnosis we shall be studying and shall be talking about only hypnosis as we go forward to study hypnosis in this paper.

Hypnosis has been treading the line between quackery and therapy since around the 18th century, but recently it has been picking up steam as an alternative treatment for many disorders.

What is hypnosis, does it work, and if so, how?

First, let us understand what is this phenomenon.

**Hypnosis Process-** Dictionary meaning of Hypnosis is “the practice of causing a person to enter a state in which he responds very readily to suggestions or commands and Hypnotism is the study or practice of hypnosis.

A recent review published in the journal *Neuroscience and Bio-behavioural Reviews* has defined hypnosis as a kind of top-down regulation of conscious awareness, a process in which “mental representations override physiology, perception, and behaviour.” As the authors explain, hypnosis involves two main elements: induction and suggestions. The hypnotic induction is the first suggestion delivered during the process of hypnosis (Cohut Maria 2017).

Let us understand what is **Hypnotic Induction**:

### **Hypnotic Induction**

The induction stage is where a person is guided into a state of hypnosis. There are various ways to bring in the induction stage of hypnosis as brought out by in the paper, “*How to hypnotize someone*”, the details are given hereunder:

Progressive hypnotic induction takes more time than some of the other, faster options. The idea is that using verbal suggestions, you have the client follow your instructions and 'progressively relax' every part of their body. It really is as simple as that. Also, it's highly effective for a great many subjects, which is why this induction is the first choice for many hypnotists. Progressive inductions can involve various different elements. You can give suggestions relating to:

- Breathing: With every breath that you exhale, this will help you to relax even more completely now... Breathing deeper and drifting deeper into hypnosis...'
- Muscular relaxation: 'Focus on the muscles in and around your eyes... Relax those eye muscles so completely now that they're almost immovable... Comfortably relaxed and immovable as you drift even deeper...'

## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives

- Tension vs. relaxation: ‘Squeeze all of the muscles in your arms and hands... Notice the tension as you inhale... Squeezing... And now exhale and relax everything... Notice the difference as you become even more relaxed now...’
- Visualization: ‘I’d like you to imagine yourself in a wonderfully relaxing environment... Whether a place you know or a new place... This place is the perfect place for you to allow yourself to completely relax now...’
- Counting: ‘I shall now count backward from 10 to 1, each number I say, will take you 10% deeper into a deep hypnotic relaxation... Deeper with each breath and each number that you hear...’

As all subjects respond differently to hypnosis and suggestion, it can be a good idea to include a few of the different elements mentioned above. Some people will respond better to more physical suggestions, such as muscular relaxation. Others will respond more to counting and cognitive approaches. Whereas some prefer visualizations and will engage more when asked to ‘imagine a scene’. There are many different versions and variations on this progressive relaxation induction, and you can use and adapt those elements you feel are most appropriate for you, and your subject.

**Eye Fixation Hypnotic Induction:** Some types of hypnotic induction rely on having a subject focus on an external point, whilst giving them suggestions for the eyes to become tired and heavy. Then, when the subject can no longer hold their eyes open, they are told to close their eyes and go into hypnosis. For this induction, the subject can look at any point, such as a light, the sky, or the ceiling. Even the old ‘swinging watch’ works well for this. Some types of hypnotic induction rely on having a subject focus on an external point, whilst giving them suggestions for the eyes to become tired and heavy. Then, when the subject can no longer hold their eyes open, they are told to close their eyes and go into hypnosis. For this induction, the subject can look at any point, such as a light, the sky, or the ceiling. Even the old ‘swinging watch’ works well for this.

**Rapid Hypnotic Inductions:** Rapid inductions are used when hypnotists do not have long periods available for putting the subject into a hypnotic trance, e.g., at staged shows. There are three ways to do it:

- Shock inductions: Shock inductions involve giving the subject a shock (i.e. making them jump), which then creates a moment of confusion, whereby the hypnotist can give the command to ‘sleep’ (but as you know, hypnosis isn’t sleep), and because the subject is shocked/confused, they more easily accept this suggestion and go into hypnosis instantly.
- Confusion inductions: Confusion inductions can also be very fast, and are similar to shock inductions. You’re looking to get the subject into an ‘overloaded’ state, where they are unable to continue following your suggestions, and it becomes much easier for them to just accept your suggestion to go into hypnosis. For example, you could have your subject count backward from 1,000,000 whilst rubbing their hands clockwise for 3 rubs, then counter-clockwise for 7 rubs, whilst tapping their feet on the floor. That’s a lot of stuff to do! So, a subject will get confused, and be unable to complete the task. At the point of confusion, you simply tell them to ‘sleep’!
- Pattern interruption inductions: Pattern interruption inductions usually involve a ‘handshake interrupt’. This means you go to shake the subject’s hand, and then you interrupt the handshake process, which again causes confusion, and suggests that they ‘sleep’ and go into hypnosis. This one’s really simple, but can be tricky to

## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives

master, due to the fact that the subject will be trying to shake your hand. If you plan on using this induction, get a bunch of practice first.

**Conversational Hypnotic Inductions:** A final type of induction that is popular with 'Ericksonian hypnotherapists' is the conversational hypnosis approach. This is where a 'formal induction process' isn't used at all, and instead, the hypnotist simply uses 'embedded commands' (subtle hypnotic suggestions) within a seemingly un-hypnosis-related conversation. The idea is that the subject will pick up on said suggestions on a subconscious level, and will begin to go into hypnosis, even perhaps with their eyes remaining open. This is a much more covert way of generating a state of hypnosis and is great for those subjects that are resistant or unsure about being hypnotized.

So, these are the hypnotic inductions that tend to take the subject into a hypnotic state and after this, the hypnotist starts the next state which is "Suggestions State"

### *Hypnotic Suggestions State*

Suggestions or deepening state is typically expressed as implications that elicit seemingly involuntary responses from the participants, who do not believe they have much, or any, control over the situation. Some people are also more "suggestible" than others, and researchers have found that highly suggestible people are likelier to have a reduced sense of control while under hypnosis. Hypnotic suggestibility has been defined as "the ability to experience suggested alterations in physiology, sensations, emotions, thoughts, or behaviour." (Cohut Maria).

This second stage in the hypnotic process is to deepen the trance state. This 'deepening' prepares the unconscious mind to be more receptive to new suggestions. Furthermore, once the new suggestions have been accepted new patterns of thinking and behaviors will follow. Sometimes the techniques used to deepen the trance are simply continuing and reinforcing the chosen induction method. However, such methods usually involve deepening bodily relaxation combined with in-depth visualization techniques led by the hypnotist. Still deeper trance where the subject finally acts as per suggestions of the hypnotist is Somnambulistic state. The degree or intensity achieved in hypnosis are noticed through observation of eye movement:

1. Hypnotic State: The first stage of hypnosis is entered into on induction. This is a 'light' state of relaxation and inner focus. The hypnotic state is characterized by fluttering eye movements.
2. Cataleptic State: The second stage of hypnosis is a 'deepening' of the altered state. This level is characterized by side-to-side eye movements.
3. Somnambulistic State: This stage is the deepest 'trance state' characterized by rolling upwards of the eyes. Suggestions are received on an unconscious level and the person may have no memory of hearing them.

The lasting effect of suggestions on the subject happens in the Somnambulistic state and may leave an imprint in his subconscious mind to have an effect on his subsequent behavioral patterns.

### *Ending the Hypnosis process*

The ending of the hypnosis session is quite straightforward and involves a gradual return to full consciousness. A common method is counting backward from 10 with the person

## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives

becoming fully aware and conscious on the number 1 with a gradual 'lightening' of the mental state along the way.

(source: <https://cult.bg/hypnotherapy-stages-works/> Sept 2018)

### ***Brain working during hypnosis***

As per Cohut Maria (2017), some areas of the brain activated during hypnosis include the prefrontal cortex, anterior cingulate cortex, and parietal networks. Neuroimaging techniques have shown that highly suggestible people exhibit higher activity levels in the prefrontal cortex, anterior cingulate cortex, and parietal networks of the brain during different phases of hypnosis.

These are areas of the brain involved in a range of complex functions, including memory and perception, processing emotions, and task learning. However, the specific brain mechanisms involved in hypnosis are still unclear, though scientists are beginning to piece together the neurocognitive profile of this process.

More details are made available in the study authored by Heidi Jiang, a former research assistant at Stanford (currently a graduate student in neuroscience at North Western University) co-authored by Matthew White, MD associate professor of neurology Michael Greicius, MD, MPH. The study appeared in the journal of Stanford medicine news center on Jul 28, 2016 (<https://med.stanford.edu/news/all-news/2016/07/study-identifies-brain-areas-altered-during-hypnotic-trances.html>).

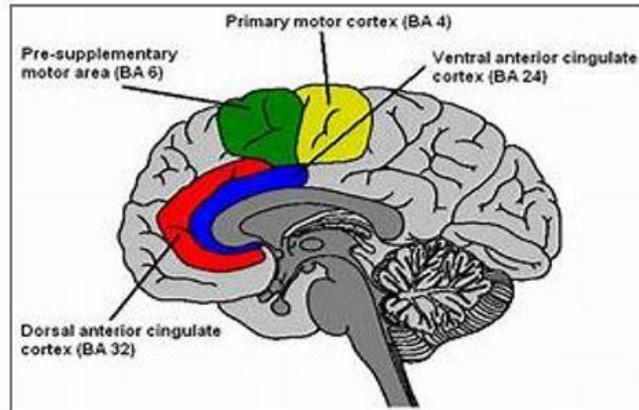
The details of the study are summarized below:

Dr. David Spiegel who holds the Jack, Samuel, and Lulu Willson Professorship in Medicine, considers Hypnosis as a serious phenomenon revealing the brain's ability to heal medical and psychiatric conditions. A study was done in which observations were made on the brains of 57 participants using functional magnetic resonance imaging, which measures brain activity by detecting changes in blood flow. Each person was scanned under four different conditions — while resting, while recalling a memory, and during two different hypnosis sessions. "It was important to have the people who aren't able to be hypnotized as controls," said Spiegel. "Otherwise, you might see things happening in the brains of those being hypnotized but you wouldn't be sure whether it was associated with hypnosis or not."

The study revealed three hallmarks of the brain under hypnosis. Each change was seen only in the highly hypnotizable group and only while they were undergoing hypnosis. The same was not found in the control group.

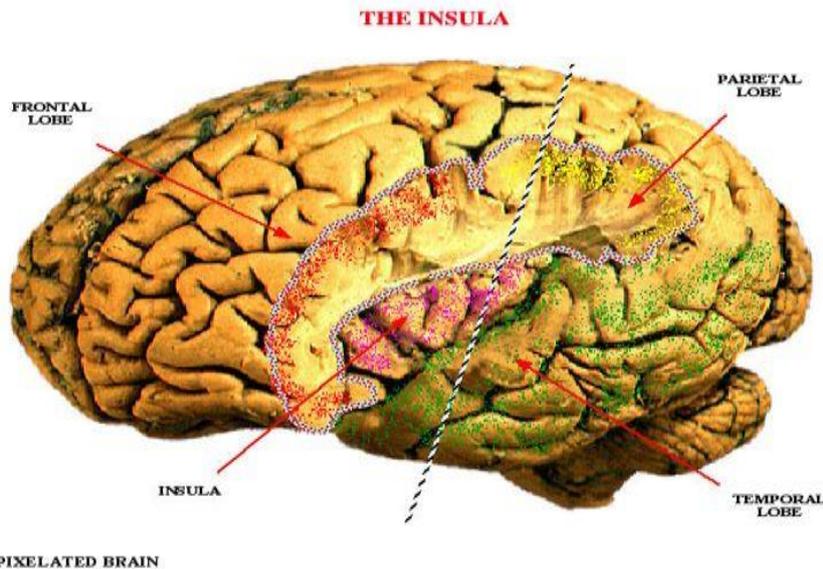
1. A decrease in activity is observed in a brain area called the dorsal anterior cingulate, part of the brain's salience network. It's a very powerful means of changing the way we use our minds to control perception and our bodies.

## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives



*Figure 1: Dorsal Anterior Cingulate*

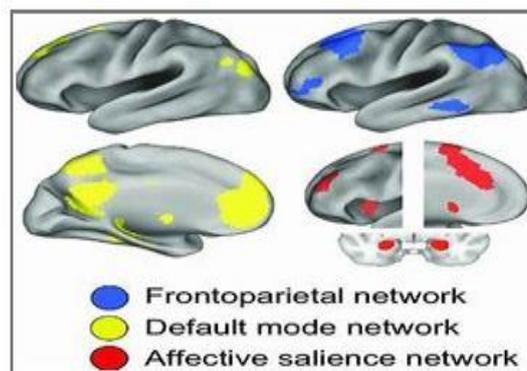
2. Secondly, an increase is observed in the connections between two other areas of the brain — the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex and the insula. He described this as a brain-body connection that helps the brain process and control what’s going on in the body.



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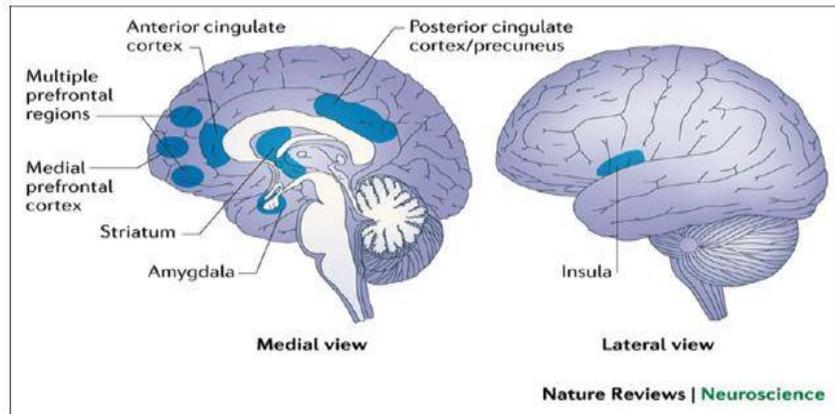
*Figure 2 : The dorsolateral prefrontal cortex and insula*

3. Finally, Spiegel’s team also observed reduced connections between the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex and the default mode network, which includes the medial prefrontal and the posterior cingulate cortex.



*Figure 3: The default mode network (DMN)*

## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives



*Figure 4: The posterior cingulate cortex and Medial Prefrontal cortex*

This decrease in functional connectivity likely represents a disconnect between someone's actions and their awareness of their actions, Spiegel said. "When you're really engaged in something, you don't really think about doing it — you just do it," he said. During hypnosis, this kind of disassociation between action and reflection allows the person to engage in activities either suggested by a clinician or self-suggested without devoting mental resources to being self-conscious about the activity.

As discussed above, Hypnosis has some brain areas which get activated when the process of hypnosis is going on. Hypnosis sessions have been shown to be effective in lessening chronic pain, the pain of childbirth and other medical procedures; treating smoking addiction and post-traumatic stress disorder; and easing anxiety or phobias. We shall discuss these details when we take up Hypnotherapy—the usage to which hypnosis has been put for the benefit of mankind. Hypnosis affects the behaviour of humans and its effect can be utilized in positive ways. More of this in the section when we discuss the benefits accruing out of hypnosis.

First let us take a view of history of hypnosis:

### *History of Hypnosis*

Having understood the process of Hypnosis, let us see how it got evolved over the last centuries. The term "hypnosis" is derived from the Ancient Greek word for "sleep" ("Hypnos"). Research suggests the word Hypnosis was first coined in the early 19th century by Étienne Félix d'Henin de Cuvillers, a Frenchman interested in the role of suggestion on the mind, and the mental and behavioural processes that took place when someone fell into a hypnotic trance. Other sources suggest that it was Scottish surgeon Dr. James Braid who coined the term.

The concept of the hypnotic trance was born in the 18th century, with the German physician Franz Mesmer. Mesmer claimed that he could showcase the existence of something he called "animal magnetism," which is an invisible fluid that "flows" between people, animals, plants, and things, and which can be manipulated to influence people's behaviour. Mesmer's sham practices gave hypnosis a bad start, but interest for its potential persisted in the medical sphere. In the 20th and 21st centuries, hypnosis continued to be explored, and specialists have gained a better understanding of what it is and how it can sometimes be harnessed to bring health benefits. ( Cohut Maria (2017)

## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives

Similar information is provided by Kotera Yosuihiro (2018): As per him the term 'Hypnosis' was first used by Scottish ophthalmologist, James Braid, who coined this word. It originated from the Greek word for 'sleep'. Modern science later proved hypnosis was not related to sleep but one thing hypnosis and sleep have in common is the enhancement of our external focus.

As observed above, the history of hypnosis dates back to the late 18th century when Franz Mesmer, a German physician, developed mesmerism, his beliefs about the balance of magnetic power in our body, using animal magnetism.

The beginning of the scientific application to weird and unnatural phenomena starts with Mesmer (1733-1815).

Mesmer while experimenting on the effect of magnets in physiological functions of the body (e.g., blood flow rates) realized that there existed energy in the universe that flows in our body as well, and if the distribution of this energy is balanced, the body remains healthy. Imbalance leads to sickness and health disorders.

He termed this energy in the body as "Animal Magnetism". To treat health disorders; animal magnetism could be transferred from a healthy body to the patient to bring uniformity of this energy to cure the person. The transference could be done simply by touch.

He could cure many patients having fits and seizures. He and his disciples, while doing this therapy, found that their patients, during therapy went to a sleep-like state and were responding to their commands. The phenomenon became popular as, "Mesmerism", which ultimately, over a period of time developed to "Hypnotism"- a therapy used even now by Psychologists to treat patients with mental disorders. Not only that but, the use of a trance-like mental state is also made in current experimental parapsychological research.

Some of Mesmer's patients, in a sleep-like state, were able to gain access to information/events that were inaccessible to them through normal means, e.g., describing actions done by a person in another room. These were the first-ever known instances of Telepathy witnessed under controlled conditions.

However, the concept of animal magnetism was rejected a decade later as it had no scientific basis. Dr. Yasuihiro Kotera (2017) goes on to say-many clinicians were fascinated by the fact that Mesmer did cure many symptoms of patients.

In the mid-19th century, Austrian physician, Josef Breuer's work got attention for his treatment of Anna. O for hysteria. Breuer used suggestive hypnosis to trigger Anna's childhood emotions, which resulted in the reduction of her symptoms.

A good colleague of Breuer was Sigmund Freud. Through hypnosis work, Freud discovered our unconscious process, which was a significant finding, especially in psychoanalysis. Although Freud attempted to use hypnosis, it was a free association that he invested in which clients talk freely and the clinician analyses their deep psychology. Later, in the mid-20th century, Melanie Kline, the leading developer of the object relation theory, reported that Freud became too authoritative in hypnosis, which hindered his hypnosis results.

## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives

The most prominent figure in modern hypnosis is American psychiatrist, Milton Erickson, who was a master of using language creatively in order to communicate with patients' unconscious. What was unique in his approach was that he was not interested in identifying the cause of the symptoms, like many other clinicians back then, instead his focus was on helping patients release their symptoms by stopping the defence functions. He made outstanding clinical successes, and his methods were called Ericksonian hypnosis, which was strongly embedded in other contemporary approaches such as neuro-linguistic programming (NLP). We shall discuss more about him when we discuss stalwarts of Hypnosis.

In the late 20th century, the American Psychological Association established the Division 30 Society of Psychological Hypnosis. Since then, the science of hypnosis has been developed rigorously.

Today we have professional hypnotherapists some of them are also psychiatrists trained in hypnosis and they are engaged in treating patients having mental disorders. Other Clinical hypnotherapists treat patients suffering from pain.

So much so for the history.

### *Difference between Mesmerism and Hypnosis*

Mesmerism and Hypnosis appear similar, of course, Mesmerism preceded Hypnosis. Even though apparently similar, but there is a difference in the way the processes happen. Mesmerism is a technique used to put a person into a trance-like state whereas Hypnotism is the practice of causing a person to enter a state in which he responds very readily to suggestions or commands. Mesmerism does not rely much on words and sounds but relies on touch for transferring animal magnetism to the subject. In fact, very little sound and words are used in Mesmerism whereas Hypnotism relies heavily on words and sounds. Lastly, Mesmerism is considered to be effective for psychosomatic conditions and Hypnotism is effective for maladaptive behavioral conditions. Mesmerism faded with the passage of time but Hypnosis became popular when its use was accepted in clinical alleviation of pain and in psychiatric cases. Hypnosis is popular in current times because of its therapeutic use.

Useful though, but is the phenomenon of Hypnosis considered a part of mainstream science? This aspect will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

### *Is Hypnosis phenomenon scientific?*

Let us find out whether the Hypnosis process could be considered scientific. To understand what processes are scientific and what are not scientific, we should first know the definition of science. Dobson Andrew (2020) mentions that Science is defined as an enterprise that builds and organizes knowledge in the form of testable explanations and predictions about the natural/material world, through a strict and defined process called the Scientific Method. The Scientific method refers to a body of techniques for investigating phenomena, acquiring new knowledge, or correcting and integrating previous knowledge.

A scientific study will start with a hypothesis (a statement that logically follows from existing knowledge) that is designed to investigate one specific and defined effect. The findings of science do not prove something – it shows that one idea (hypothesis) has a much higher probability of being more correct than another.

## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives

This is one of the issues with a theory about what hypnosis is. There are several hypotheses about "what hypnosis is" and "how hypnosis works" and the results so far do not show any hypothesis as having more data to stand above the others. The truthfully answer to the question "What is hypnosis" is "We don't know yet"

Science does not attempt to investigate or explain anything non-physical. It does not investigate or can be called upon in an attempt to understand the paranormal or metaphysical. By its very definition the Metaphysical is not physical matter, and the attempt to bring science into such realms is referred to as Pseudoscience (claim, belief, or practice which is presented as scientific, but which does not adhere to a valid scientific method, lacks supporting evidence or plausibility, cannot be reliably tested, or otherwise lacks scientific status) and this is what hypnosis is- A Hypnotherapist has usually never been trained to question or validate a result, rather the results seem to confirm what they were taught and it makes sense to accept the given explanation of what is happening. And many people who learn Hypnotherapy have come to it from a Metaphysical belief system and also since it lacks causation claim; hypnosis is considered pseudoscience and not mainstream science.

Hypnosis, as it stands today is at best Pseudoscience as it stands on metaphysical belief and lacks causable claims. Results do however speak of its effectiveness.

We have so far learned the meaning of Hypnotism which is nothing but the study of hypnosis and we have learned how hypnosis originated and its brief history, and what happens to the person undergoing hypnosis. We also learned the brain functioning during the brain and finally discussed and concluded that hypnosis is a pseudoscience. Even though mainstream science may not give it a place in its lap but it has an important place amongst humans because of the important use this phenomenon is put to.

### ***Application of Hypnosis amongst humans***

We started the paper with the stage show where a hypnotist is amusing the spectators by making the subject undergoing hypnosis do funny things as per his suggestions which amazes the spectators. Apart from amusing the people, hypnosis is put to far important uses. The most important being the therapeutic use.

### ***Hypnosis serving therapeutic use-***

Ivan Tyrrell (2015) explains how hypnosis is used effectively for therapeutic use: The bright side to hypnosis is to use it in therapy. To recap, hypnosis is the accessing of the Rapid Eye Movement (REM) state artificially by focusing attention until it can be guided. Once a person is in that trance state, therapists can make powerful, positive psychological interventions, such as offering metaphors, embedding empowering suggestions, giving direct instructions, and guiding rehearsal of desired new behaviour in imagination, such as successful public speaking or driving confidently. Trance also provides the best platform for unhooking strong emotions from traumatic memories that the brain has interpreted as life-threatening, which is why, using specific techniques, offers the quickest means to help people overcome phobias. Trance plus therapeutic interventions are what constitutes hypnotherapy

Hypnosis results in activating agents, in doing pattern matching, affecting emotion and thought. The activating is done by whatever means the therapist chooses for inducing the REM state in the client. The client's brain pattern matches the empowering ideas suggested by the therapist and gives them personal meaning. Every pattern match fires an emotional

## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives

response (an expectation), however subtle. The client may then think about the new ideas and rehearse new possibilities. The stages of effective hypnotherapy are as follows:

- Induction: artificially access the REM state by focusing attention
- Trance: relax the client to prepare him or her for learning
- Educate: guide the client's attention and add new information that gives their life a richer context. All learning happens in trance. Whenever we recognize something familiar in the world, it is always because we are making a pattern match between what is out there in the environment and an internally stored pattern, which we normally call a memory. Our brains are constantly doing pattern matching to the outside world and we only become aware of that if something different from the norm occurs – the orientation response fires and our attention is drawn to it. All learning, by its nature, involves novelty and we have to focus, however briefly, on what is new and different in order to absorb it. That requires us to go into the REM state. When the new knowledge to be absorbed is profound, we need to introspect about this new pattern match and adjust our model of reality to it. Thus, all learning is post-hypnotic.
- Heal – help bring about psychological healing by guiding a person to access positive life resources and harness the mental processes needed to rehearse healthy new behaviours; and physical healing, by helping or motivating the body to heal itself.
- Ensure volition: give complete control back to the client.
- Actually, the most important stage in Hypnotherapy of the Hypnosis process is the suggestions that are designed to change thought patterns and behaviours. Often these suggestions for self-improvement will have been agreed upon by the hypnotist as well as the patient in the initial introduction.
- The wording of the suggestions is very important. Research has shown that the unconscious mind responds well to open suggestions or questions but does not recognize negative suggestions.

A skilled hypnotherapist will be able to coach the suggestions to affect the change in a way that each individual will respond to alleviate the suffering, be it pain or addiction.

A post-hypnotic suggestion is made during the hypnotic process but has an effect at a later point in the future so that the intended purpose of therapy is served. Furthermore, the suggestion may be accepted immediately but sometimes repeated suggestions have to be made over repeated sessions to take deep root in the unconscious mind. However, once the suggestions get accepted, thought patterns will change and finally the new thought patterns will lead to behavioural changes needed for curing the problem.

Some cases in which hypnotherapy has been found useful include:

- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) -- People undergo hypnotherapy to seek help in managing Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Studies have suggested that hypnosis can relieve IBS symptoms in the short term, though long-term effectiveness has not yet been conclusively tested.
- Insomnia and sleep disorders-- Hypnosis can help to manage insomnia, nightmares, and sleep terrors (which tend to affect children between the ages of 7 and 12), as well as some more unusual sleep disorders, such as sleepwalking. Relaxation and self-control suggestions are used to address these conditions.
- Migraine- Some research suggests that hypnosis can be effective in treating migraines and tension headaches, and it might be a desirable alternative treatment thanks to the lack of side effects.

## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives

- Clinical pain control. Hypnosis can have analgesic effects in the case of acute clinical pain, which usually means pain resulting from surgical procedures. Some studies also indicate that hypnosis may help women to manage childbirth pain, though supporting evidence is mixed.
- Quitting smoking. The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health details studies suggesting that hypnotherapy may help people who want to give up smoking, especially if paired with other means of treatment. But in this case, too, supporting evidence is mixed.
- Mental Health issues- Some Psychiatric disorders like obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), hysteria, and anxiety can also be treated using hypnotherapy.

We all know a coin has two faces, similarly, there are two sides of each aspects-bright aspect and a dark side of it. We have a straight side and flip side as we call it. The hypnosis phenomenon, also has two sides, we saw the brighter side which goes in to benefit mankind but we also have a darker side which could lead to harm. On one side is the truth about Hypnosis which guides us in making use of the process in a healthy manner but on the other side, there are half-truths or misconception which may put us to harm even if the actions are unintentional.

### *Misconceptions, and half-truths about Hypnosis*

Ivan Tyrrell dwells on these aspects in his paper as follows: Hypnosis – accesses the brain’s programming pathway and can be used to do harm as well as good, both intentionally and unintentionally. A half-truth is just as dangerous as a lie, even if offered with the best of intentions.

Unfortunately, a great many half-truths or myths have sprouted about hypnosis, and practitioners need to be careful not to promulgate them. They include the following:

- “Hypnosis is a natural state of relaxation and concentration, with a heightened awareness induced by suggestion”
- It isn't. It is an artificial means of accessing the Rapid Eye Movement (REM) state, which can even be done violently by capturing attention with a sudden loud noise or startling movement. It can be done in a gradual manner as well as in a sudden manner when the hypnotist does not have much time at his disposal so it is not a natural state of relaxation
- “Hypnosis is safe with no unpleasant side effects”
- It is far from safe. It is an extremely powerful process and anything powerful can be used to do harm as well as good. Some people feel dizzy or uneasy, even after a relaxing session. They may feel psychologically unnerved about being 'out of control', particularly if they didn't like the suggestions that were made to them. The literature is full of unpleasant or even dangerous effects that have been experienced after hypnosis. They include extreme fatigue; antisocial acting out; anxiety; panic attacks; attention deficit; body/self-image distortions; comprehension/concentration loss; confusion; impaired coping skills; delusional thinking; depression; depersonalization; dizziness; fearfulness; headache; insomnia; irritability; impaired or distorted memory; nausea and vomiting; uncontrolled weeping and many, many more.
- “The subject will be aware of everything that is said to him/her”
- Sometimes that is the case when someone is in a light trance but very often it is not, and that again parallels with dreaming since we don't remember most of our dreams.

## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives

When people go into a deep trance, they often have no memory of what the therapist said. That is not to say that they didn't register it, but they cannot consciously recall it.

- “Hypnosis has nothing to do with sleep – it is just an extremely relaxed state”
- Clearly, this is wrong because hypnosis is very directly related to sleep: the REM (dreaming) stage of sleep is the deepest trance state of all.
- • “A hypnotist cannot influence anyone to do anything against their will”
- We know simply by delving into the history of hypnosis of many examples of unwanted influence. There are many modern-day incidents, some of which are recorded on CCTV cameras, such as cashiers being hypnotized and handing over the money in their tills because they were put into a trance state, or people being shocked into a trance and robbed in the street.
- “A person’s own ‘moral code’ will protect them from doing anything against their own best interests”
- There is no evidence that people can be relied upon not to do things against their own best interests and masses of evidence that they do so all the time. It is known that crimes have been committed under the influence of hypnosis
- “The ‘unconscious’ is very wise”
- I heard a hypnotherapist saying these exact words, in a lovely, caring tone. The unconscious is not necessarily wise at all. As far as the unconscious mind is concerned it results in bringing out the real self which may not be necessarily wise. As we know much of the therapeutic work done is just overriding the problematic areas through suggestions during the hypnotic state. The unconscious is not wise but it brings out reality in you and the reality could be influenced and unwanted behavior patterns can be amended

### *The dark side of hypnosis*

Many a time the hypnosis results in creating unrealistic situations due to misuse of the power of suggestions in the hypnotic state.

- Creating false (illusory) memories
- The ease with which this can be done has been demonstrated countless times, particularly through the pioneering work of psychologist Elizabeth Loftus. In the 1980s and 1990s, whole families have pulled apart as a result of supposed memories of parental sexual abuse being 'uncovered' in therapy. The European Therapy Studies Institute, the predecessor for Human Givens College, put on the first major seminar to alert clinicians to false memory syndrome. In one case, a young woman recalled in therapy that she had been repeatedly raped by a group of Satanists that included members of her family and others in the local community. But it emerged later that she had reached a confabulation stage through the hypnotic suggestions and was making up imaginary stories to fill in the gaps of her memory. Such hypnotic seances do irreparable damage to the subjects
- Inducing hallucinations,
- which can lead vulnerable people into psychotic breakdowns. This is the stock in trade of the stage hypnotist, of course. It's dangerous because a person in a psychotic state is unable to distinguish between the dream state and waking reality in the way that we normally do.
- Damaging a person’s very essence
- When we use hypnotic techniques to help someone access the REM state, we are tapping into that individual's unique 'essence'. The hypnotic induction is, in fact, a

## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives

form of trespass upon the private mental territory of another's essence. This is territory that we should only enter respectfully if invited in, and we must be careful to close the gate properly when we leave. Using hypnosis repeatedly with an individual is ultimately weakening to them. The aim of therapy is to help people detach and cope alone, not become dependent. Extreme cases of repeated hypnosis can even eventually derange the brain. From continued regular sessions of hypnosis from another person, entering into this docile state, instead of gaining power and better control, the mind can become a shapeless powerless mass eventually leading to the mental asylum.

The last dark aspect is the most dangerous where the power of suggestions if not done in a proper way can leave the subject in a devastating state.

The gist of the above discussions is that there is a great responsibility on experts in hypnosis and hypnotherapists that they use the power of suggestions in a constructive positive way and must be fully aware of the damages their wrong acts can do to their subjects. The purpose of the above discussions was not to dim the importance of good service being rendered by the hypnotherapists but is just a word of caution not to deviate to a destructive path knowingly or unknowingly.

Let us now move on to learn about the stalwarts in hypnotherapy and hypnosis. Discussions on Hypnotherapy will not be complete unless we discuss Milton Erickson, and Ernest R Hilgard who were stalwarts in the field of hypnosis

### *Milton Erickson*



*Source:* [exploringyourmind.com/milton-erickson-hypnosis/](https://exploringyourmind.com/milton-erickson-hypnosis/) 25<sup>th</sup> July 2020

He is considered the father of Hypnotherapy. He was the first president of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis. Milton Erickson was born in Phoenix, Arizona in 1901. During that time, people still considered hypnosis an esoteric technique or circus. However, he made an effort to turn it into a valid therapeutic tool.

Several psychology schools of thought (especially behaviorism) influenced his work. He was the first president of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis, which made him

## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives

famous. Milton Erickson didn't have an easy life. His parents were low-class farmers and he suffered from several health problems. He only started to speak at the age of 4. At that age, he was diagnosed with dyslexia. He was also color blind and suffered from tone-deafness.

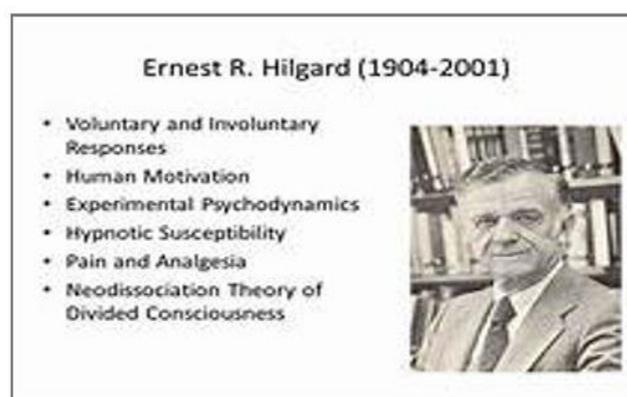
When he was 17, he contracted poliomyelitis, which paralyzed him completely. He could only move his eyes. Although his doctors believed he wouldn't improve, Erickson firmly believed that he'd recover. Thus, he became very attentive to his bodily sensations. It's safe to say that his condition forced him to become an excellent observer. Although he was sick, he tried to be aware of everything that was happening around him. This allowed him to detect and understand many aspects of non-verbal language. By carefully observing his younger sister (who was taking her first steps), he learned to walk again. Despite his great limitations, Milton Erickson studied to become a doctor and psychologist. During this period, he analyzed Clark L. Hull's theories of suggestibility. Said theories fascinated him so much that he began to thoroughly research hypnosis and everything related to it. Over time, Milton Erickson started criticizing Hull's practices. He also studied Sigmund Freud's work but didn't agree with his basic approaches. He believed hypnosis was a therapeutic tool. However, he thought that the patient should play a more active role. He used to say—"Our client's problem is that they have lost rapport with their unconscious mind. Our job is to help restore that relationship."

Milton Erickson's main goal was to help his patients deal with the symptoms that afflicted them. To accomplish this, he even used unorthodox methods. That's the reason why many considered him a "guru" or even a "magician".

Unlike Freud, Milton Erickson didn't really care about the patient's past. He thought that it was more important to concentrate on the now, especially on solving current problems. He developed approaches that are still used today, such as neuro-linguistic programming and solution-focused brief therapy. Milton Erickson was primarily a clinical psychologist. Developing new theories didn't interest him that much. Instead, he focused on developing highly effective practices that could help people.

At age 50, he suffered a new polio attack and took advantage of it to analyze the sensations and come up with pain management methods. In fact, he expressed this whole process in one of his books. He passed away at the age of 78. (source Milton Erickson and hypnosis, 2020) Milton Erickson was indeed a legend in the field of hypnosis and made a great contribution to Hypnotherapy.

### *Ernest R Hilgard*



(Source:[https://uk.images.search.yahoo.com/search/images;\\_ylt=AwrGau6o8Zg9nEAAXIM34IQ;\\_ylu=Y29sbwNncTEEcG9zAzEEdnRpZAMEc2VjA3Nj?p=pictures+of+Ernest+Hilgard&fr=mcafee](https://uk.images.search.yahoo.com/search/images;_ylt=AwrGau6o8Zg9nEAAXIM34IQ;_ylu=Y29sbwNncTEEcG9zAzEEdnRpZAMEc2VjA3Nj?p=pictures+of+Ernest+Hilgard&fr=mcafee))

## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives

Ernest Hilgard distinguished himself through his studies of the role of hypnosis in human behavior and response.

Much of Hilgard's research and writing on the topic was done with his wife, Josephine R. Hilgard (1906-1989).

Born in Belleville, Illinois, on July 25, 1904, Ernest Ropiequit Hilgard was the son of a physician, and he showed an early interest in science. Interestingly, it was engineering, not psychology, that originally attracted Hilgard; he received a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from the University of Illinois in 1924. He decided that he wanted to study psychology, and he went to Yale, where he was awarded his Ph.D. in 1930. His initial area of interest was conditioned responses. He did extensive research with the human eyelid; as part of this research, he developed a photographic technique for examining the responses. His work demonstrated the relationship between voluntary and involuntary responses and won him the Warren Medal in Experimental Psychology in 1940.

Later, Hilgard became intrigued by the mechanism behind hypnosis. In part, this was not an unusual move: his work on voluntary and involuntary responses focused on the control factor, as does hypnosis.

Hilgard, working with his wife and other colleagues, began experimenting and collecting data on hypnosis as a means of, among other things, treating pain. One of the interesting aspects of Hilgard's research into hypnosis is the concept of what he calls the "hidden observer." Ostensibly, a person undergoing hypnosis to manage pain, for example, feels no conscious pain. That does not mean the pain is not there, however; nor does it mean that the patient's subconscious is not registering the pain. In one experiment conducted by Hilgard, subjects were hypnotized and told they would feel no pain or discomfort when an arm was placed in ice water, or when a tourniquet was tied at the elbow to restrict blood flow to the arm. The subjects reported no pain or discomfort during these procedures.

After teaching at Yale for three years, Hilgard accepted a position at Stanford in 1933. He headed the psychology department at Stanford from 1942 to 1951 and served as dean of the graduate division from 1951 to 1955. He became a professor emeritus in 1969 but continued on as head of the Laboratory of Hypnosis Research. Among Hilgard's awards over the years are the American Psychological Association's Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award (1969) and the American Psychological Foundation's Gold Career Award (1978). His memberships include the National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the National Academy of Education. (source: George A Milite, 2021). We discussed various aspects related to hypnotism, the study of hypnosis, and also learned about the stalwarts in the field.

I shall be concluding the paper with a bizarre application of hypnosis which if researched in a scientific manner could lead us to understand the mystery behind death and after-life. It sounds strange and I, personally, am confused about it because having learned the dark side of hypnosis could it be that the aspects revealed by a subject during the hypnotic state are really coming from the subconscious memories or whether the hypnotist is trying to implant these in his mind. The readers should draw their own conclusion after I dwell on the use of hypnosis in bringing out details about after-life when a practicing professional hypnotist took the subject into the subject's early childhood and then probed the subject to go beyond and transgress into past lives.

## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives

Dr. Michael Duff Newton holds a doctorate in Counselling Psychology and is a state-certified Master Hypnotherapist in California USA, and is a member of the American Counselling Association. Through his own age-regression hypnosis techniques, Newton discovered that it is possible to take his clients beyond their past-life experiences to uncover a meaningful soul existence between lives.

Dr. Michael Newton (2013, 2017) in his books "Journey of Souls" and "Destiny of Souls" talks about his several case studies where during sessions of hypnotherapy, he could take his subjects to their early childhood and then probe them to transgress beyond: they started describing their past lives and also about the period between their different past lives- the spirit world. He had more than ninety such seances which brought out the description about the transcendence of his subjects from death into the after-life, the spirit world.

The case studies give vivid descriptions in the hypnosis session wherein the subject responds to open-ended questions posed by Newton and the subjects describe what they are experiencing in the transcendental after-life state where they have transgressed in the hypnotic session. Newton is careful not to give any suggestions to the subject, he only prods them to describe what they are observing in their trance state after reaching the after-life stage. During the session, he tries to bring them back to the transgressed spiritual stage when they show indications of going astray and do not wish to remain confined to the spiritual state.

Pooling the descriptions of many subjects, Dr. Newton arrives at a common scenario of the spirit world and about the experience of transcending from life to death and beyond. Invariably all subjects mention that the moment of transcending from life to death is not painful but is a blissful experience when the body is left behind and the conscious self (we call it soul) gets detached from the body and moves towards a bright light emerging from a long tunnel. The bright light is comforting and some unknown power is making the conscious self (the soul) get attracted towards the soothing bright light.

It is important to point out here that this experience is corroborated with the experience of people who had near-death experiences i.e., the experiences of patients who were on the verge of death but were resuscitated and brought back to life. I am a parapsychological researcher who has been researching psi phenomena including life after death and I was pleasantly surprised to find that the above narrations given by the living subjects during hypnosis match with the NDEs (near-death experiences).

Their narration does not stop here but they describe that the world beyond life, the spiritual world is very organized and the souls or spirits are engaged in routine lives in a structured way as we do in our real physical lives on earth. The only difference is that they do not have physical bodies but are visualized as blotches of light of different colors depending upon their seniority levels.

Almost all the subjects have vividly described the process of getting stabilized in the spirit world through the help and guidance provided by their guides (who could be their ancestors from previous lives) who come to greet them when they are leaving physical bodies and have crossed over the tunnel of bright light. The communication between the spirits happens through mind-to-mind connections. They get settled in the spirit world and their further learnings continue but some of them are not entered into the learning phase but are sent back to earth by their guides to lead another life on earth.

## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives

The description of the spirit world arising out of the hypnosis process appears to be so realistic as if we were viewing it ourselves. For more details, readers are requested to read the above two books.

Thus, the process of hypnosis could also help us the parapsychologists in our research into life after death if parapsychologists together with other researchers could pursue research to reach a scientific conclusion that the facts revealed during the transgressed spiritual state of subjects are really the result of observations of the subject and not the result of subtle implant done by the hypnotist. If proved, then deeper probing through hypnosis will lead to more facts about after-life and it will be a great help to the parapsychological research. But there is a big IF- i.e., if this transgressing is really from the subject's subconscious mind and is not an implant from the mind of the hypnotist.

Hypnosis and Parapsychological phenomena (viz., telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis) have a commonality that both are related to the working of mind and mind are still mysterious and we are still researching mind. Consciousness/ subconsciousness/super consciousness which underly the hypnosis and the parapsychological phenomena are still a hard problem to scientists.

The scientific basis behind the phenomenon of hypnosis and also for Parapsychology will get revealed only through Mind/Consciousness research and that lies in the future and till then we keep our fingers crossed but keep on reaping the benefits of Hypnotherapy which is aiding the medical fraternity in a big way!!

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## Hypnotism—Some Perspectives

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The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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